

A lawyer by the name of Jeff, no relation to me, was suffering terribly. He'd opened the door of his BMW, when suddenly a car came along and hit the door, ripping it off completely.

When the police officer arrived at the scene, Jeff was complaining bitterly about the damage to his precious BMW. "Officer, look what they've done to my Beemer," he whined.

The Officer was totally disgusted. "You lawyers are so materialistic. You make me sick! "You're so worried about your stupid BMW, that you didn't even realize that your left arm is ripped off!!!"

"Oh my Gaaaa " Jeff hollered, finally noticing the bloody left shoulder where his arm once was. "Where's my Rolex???!!!!!!"

Our scripture passage this morning is also about suffering. It's taken, first, from the Hebrew Bible. The 22nd Psalm. Verses 1-5:

1 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?

2 O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest.

So, the Psalmist starts off lamenting his trouble. There had been a

relationship between God and the Psalmist. But, he thought God had abandoned it.

Then right after that, with the word, “Yet,” the Psalmist expresses confidence in God.

3 ***Yet** you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel.*

4 *In you our ancestors trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them.*

5 *To you they cried, and were saved; in you they trusted, and were not put to shame.*

And, our second sermon text is from the gospel according to Mark, chapter 5, vss. 33-39:

33 *When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon.*

34 *At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”*

35 *When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, “Listen, he is calling for Elijah.”*

36 *And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, “Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down.”*

37 *Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last.*

38 *And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.*

39 *Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, “Truly this man was God’s Son!”*

The Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Pray with me please: *God, may these words from your Holy Scriptures change our hearts and change us, so that we’re not the same people when we leave this room as we were when we came into it. This is our hope. And, this is our prayer. Amen.*

This morning, I’m going to focus my remarks on Psalm 22. But, before I do, I want to quickly comment on Jesus’s quoting Psalm 22 as he hung on the cross.

What’s the significance of that? Could it be to demonstrate Jesus’s humanity. He was not just divine. He was human, too. Jesus’s lament as

he hung on the cross is the same lament of the Psalmist, another human being.

The Psalmist is desperate, dark, despondent, and depressed. “My God, My God. Why have you forsaken me.” Have you ever said that? Or, at least thought it? The Psalmist’s pain was personal.

A newspaper reporter phoned a story into his editor about an empty truck that rolled down a hill and smashed into a home.

The editor was unimpressed and told reporter he didn’t want to run the story. “I’m glad you’re taking this so calmly,” the reporter said. “Would it make a difference if you knew it was your house?”

It’s different when the suffering gets personal, isn’t it? That’s what we have here in Psalm 22. The suffering was personal. And, it got the Psalmist’s attention.

As I mentioned earlier, Psalm 22 starts off with the Psalmist lamenting about his troubles. Yet, the Psalmist moves from lament to expressing confidence in God. And, although the Psalmist seems to suggest that God is not there, the Psalmist addresses God as if God is there.

And, God, of course, is.

There's so much pain in the world, both personal and otherwise. Take the war in Ukraine. Watching the news this week, I saw several interviews with children affected by the war.

One little boy said, "I'm scared. I want to go back home. I wish Mr. Putin would just leave."

"One little orphan girl, Olga, crying almost uncontrollably, saying through sobs, "We need help. I'm afraid."

Olga, already without a home. Now, she's also without a sense of safety. And, the list of suffering goes on and on.

What do we do in the midst of suffering. Ours, or someone else's? As people of faith, we're to follow the example of the Psalmist and turn to God in confidence. But, what does that look like? How do we pray?

Many years ago, I came across a prayer that literally changed my prayer life and has been my go-to in times of suffering and trouble.

And, the prayer goes like this: *"God, have mercy on me. Make haste to help me. Rescue and save me. Do your will in my life."*

I've prayed that prayer thousands of times over the years.

But, there have also been times in my life, and yours too, I'm guessing, when the pain was so real, and the suffering was so deep, that words failed me. Times when I couldn't come up with the words to pray.

A poor, uneducated Jewish boy named Joel attended synagogue with his father on the Sabbath. Joel couldn't read, but his mother had taught him the Hebrew alphabet. Moved by the beautiful service of chanted prayers, he joined in by reciting the alphabet, one letter at a time.

Joel's father told him to stop, but soon enough he was moved again to recite the letters, but this time even louder. After catching the attention of everyone, Joel prayed aloud:

"Ruler of the Universe, I know I am only a child. I want so much to sing the beautiful prayers to you, but I don't know them. I don't know how to pray.

Please, dear God, take these letters of the alphabet and rearrange them to form the words that mean what I want to say to you, what is in my heart."

Tears formed in the eyes of the father, the rabbi and the congregation. Together, they joined him saying the Hebrew alphabet, believing that God would indeed take these letters of the alphabet and rearrange them to form the words that meant what Joel wanted to say to God, and what was in his heart.

“Aleph, bet, gimmel, daled, hey, vav. . . .”

When words fail us. During those times when we can't put words together to pray, Romans 8:26 tells us that, in those times when we don't know how or what to pray, it doesn't matter. The Holy Spirit intercedes on our behalf and does our praying in and for us, making prayer out of our wordless sighs and our aching groans.

Suffering. The only way to get out of suffering is, of course, to go through it. We can't go around it or over it. We have to go through it.

When our heart is broken and our life is in pieces.

Or when the addiction or the depression have found their way back into our bones.

Or when we lose sight of the person that we were called to be,

God, while we are in the wilderness says, “Begin again child. You get another chance. I will never leave you or forsake you.”

Life finds a million ways to say know exactly where we need to hear yes. Life sometimes takes from us those we love the most, treasure the most, and need the most—way before we’re ready to give them up.

Life can be difficult. Life hardens what is soft in us, and softens what is hard. The same sun that hardens the clay melts the ice.

Of course, suffering oft times improves our patience and even our character. And it can sometimes lead to wonderful and unexpected blessings.

Several years ago, one of the young pastors at St. Peter’s Church in London church found out one of the janitor was illiterate. And, so he fired him.

Jobless, the man invested his meager savings in a tiny tobacco shop, where he prospered, bought another, expanded, and ended up with a chain of tobacco stores worth several hundred thousand dollars.

One day the man’s banker said, “You’ve done well for an illiterate,

but where would you be if you could read and write?”

“Well,” explained the man, “I guess I’d still be janitor of St. Peter’s Church in London.”

Have you ever thought your life was over? Perhaps it was because of a broken relationship. Perhaps a divorce. A cancer diagnosis. Or, perhaps you’ve lost someone close to you to death. Or something else.

Is anyone in this room suffering today?

Perhaps it’s about your family—or another relationship.

Perhaps it’s your job. Or, that you can’t find a job. Perhaps it’s your chronic health condition. Or, something else.

Perhaps you’ve done everything you were supposed to do. You’ve attended church. You’ve been faithful to your relationships.

Worked hard. You’ve been generous with your time and money. You’ve done everything right but you feel as if everything has turned out all wrong.

You may be healed from all that ails you. But, you may not. The relationship you want so badly want to work out may not.

The offer for the job you want, the paycheck you want, the apartment you want.

Or, whatever you are praying for this morning. It may come to pass. But, it may not. So, what's next. Where's the good news here?

I didn't come by today to give a sermon because I had to deliver a sermon. I came because I have a message for someone.

Every Sunday afternoon, I used to ask my Mom what her preacher sermon was about. And, each Sunday, she'd say, "I don't know. He never said."

Well, I don't want for you to be able the same thing about this sermon. Or, my Mom is here this morning. So, I don't want for her to be able to say that about this sermon.

I have some good news for someone this morning, someone who's going wobbly. Someone who came into this room this morning who thought they were doing what was right but still everything turned out all wrong.

Here's what this sermon is about. Here's your take home message.

Your help for Monday morning:

In your times of suffering, God offers you a rope of hope.

God is hope for all who are hopeless.

God really does love you. God can lift you from all your fear. God is your light.

God is strength for all who are despairing, and healing for those who live in shame.

God says to us, “Don’t be afraid, I’m with you.” God can give you peace the world is unable to give.

If you need comfort, God will give it.

If you need an encouraging word, God will say it.

And, if you need courage, God will provide it.

Perhaps you’re saying your life is in a huge knot. And, you can’t untie it. But God says to you this morning, “You don’t have to. Here let me help you.”

God will be there in your lane with you when you suffer.

Lewis’ is a large department store in Birmingham, England. Some

years ago, the store wanted to expand, and one of their projected building areas held a Friends Meeting House, a small Quaker chapel.

So, a representative of Lewis's sent a letter to the Quaker congregation, saying,

“Dear Sirs:

We wish to extend our premises. We see that your building is right in the way. We wish therefore to buy your building and demolish it so that we might expand our store.

We will pay any price you care to name. If you'll name a price we will settle the matter as quickly as possible.”

A letter came back in the return mail:

“Dear Sirs:

We in the Friends' meeting house note the desire of Lewis's to extend. We observe that our building is right in your way.

We would point out, however, that we have been on our site somewhat longer than you have been on yours, and we're determined to stay where we are.

We're so determined to stay that we will happily buy Lewis's. If therefore you would like to name a suitable price we will settle the matter as quickly as possible."

What a ludicrous response, Lewis's representative must have thought, that a small Quaker congregation could purchase this great department store.

At least he might have thought that until he saw the signature at the bottom of the letter. It was signed "Cadbury." Cadbury, an enormous chocolate and candy manufacturer in England. And the Cadbury, who were Quakers, could buy Lewis's many times over.

Sisters and brothers, it's always important to see who signs the letter. For you and me, we must always remember that it's God is the one who signed the letter for each of us. God is the one who is watching out for us. And, because of that, the very resources of Heaven stand behind us when we suffer.

At the very center of the universe is the Lord Jesus Christ who says to each one of us, all who are suffering, "Ye who are weary, come to me

and I will give you rest.”

THIS IS THE GOSPEL.

THIS IS THE GOOD NEWS.

AND, IT’S TRUE.

THANKS BE TO GOD.

AMEN.